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Workshop trains Afghans on construction skills

**By Army Capt. Ashley Dellavalle
TF Rugged Public Affairs Office**

FORWARD OPERATING BASE FENTY, Afghanistan – U.S. Army Engineers of Task Force Rugged concluded the first of three Winter Skill Labor Workshops to train local Afghans on construction skills Jan. 13.

Soldiers with the 76th Engineer Company, Task Force Pacemaker, stationed at Fort Knox, Ky., instructed 50 Afghans on masonry and carpentry skills here.

"We wanted to provide the training during a time of traditionally low economic activity," said Army 1st Lt. Alberto Locsin, the TF Pacemaker Civil Military Operations officer from Tacoma, Wash.

In a close partnership between the Engineers and local governments, the provincial labor directors nominated unemployed citizens to attend the course. Other students were nominated by Afghan contractors to improve the skill level and capability of their employees.

Saidghafoor Shah, a 32-year-old from Dari Noor, Jalalabad, participated in the workshop. As a carpenter for 10 years, Shah not only wanted to learn additional carpentry and masonry skills but said, "I want to...share ideas."

"I have learned a lot of things that I can use on the outside; it will help me get a job," Shah added. "The techniques I've learned will make me more efficient. I have learned great methods on construction."

All of the students in the course receive free room, board, transportation to and from the worksite, and the tools necessary to complete

the course requirements. At the successful completion of the course, graduates will receive a tool kit as a means to continue their endeavors in the construction industry and possibly start their own construction business. U.S. Army noncommissioned officers are instructing students with the help of interpreters.

The program, which involves hands-on training, is seven days of instruction and construction, including safety training, basic carpentry and masonry skills training, and the construction of two instructional projects, a wooden garden tool shed and a brick and block wall.

"The workshop is designed to increase the capabilities and skills of Afghans in order to improve wage-earning abilities and competition among contractors," Locsin said. "Ultimately, the workshop will improve infrastructure and the economy in Afghanistan. The workshop is also increasing the capacity of Afghan contractors increasing the skilled labor pool in the area."

Shah, as many of the participants conveyed, plans to put these skills to perfect use.

"I want to be able to serve my country, my people, and support my family," Shah said.

The next two scheduled workshops are Jan. 19 – 26 at Forward Operating Base Sharana, and Feb. 2 – 9 at Forward Operating Base Orgun E.

CUTLINES:

080110-A-9699S-090- Army Staff Sgt. Windle Morgan, Task Force Pacemaker, instructs 50 Afghans students attending a Winter Skill Labor Workshop in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. The workshop is hosted by Task Force Rugged, 36th Engineer Brigade, stationed out of Fort Hood, Texas, and the 864th Engineer Battalion of Fort Lewis, Wash. The aim of the workshop, funded by the Commander's Emergency Response Program, is to develop construction skills among local Afghan residents, ultimately improving the infrastructure and economy here. (U.S. Army Photo by 1st Lt. Kenya Saenz)

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